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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SCUL](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: DUPLICATIVE DIALOGUES AMONG CIVILIZATIONS

REF: A. A) KELLY-SHESTACK E-MAIL 2/17/06

[1](#)B. B) 2005 USUN 1055

[1](#)C. C) SHESTACK-KELLY E-MAIL 2/27/06

Classified By: AMBASSADOR A. WOLFF,
U.S. DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UNITED NATIONS, REASONS 1.4
B/D

[11.](#) (C) Summary. This is an Action Request, per para 6. The UN Mission of the Philippines is attempting to formalize follow-up to a conference on "interfaith dialogue," which their Foreign Minister chaired in New York in June 2005. Creation of a proposed follow-up group is ill-defined, duplicates the goals of the high-level Alliance of Civilizations, and has attracted little interest from non-Islamic states. Even though it is not to be an official UN body, USUN recommends that the U.S. not/not become one of the founding members of this group, possibly to be called the "Tripartite Forum for Interreligious Cooperation for Peace." Department guidance is requested. End Summary.

NEW INTERFAITH GROUP -- TERMS OF REFERENCE

[12.](#) (C) USUN has attended two meetings, on January 31 and February 20, convened by the Philippines Mission to attempt to work out Terms of Reference (TOR) (Ref A) of a proposed group to undertake interfaith dialogue among countries, UN bodies and civil society at the United Nations. Civil society was represented by the board of the Committee of Religious NGOs, but did not include any Jewish or Islamic NGO representatives. Although some UN agencies were represented, no representatives were invited from either OHCHR or the Alliance of Civilizations. Discussions of the draft TOR were dominated by Pakistan, Iran, Bangladesh and Egypt. Neither Israel nor most EU countries attended. U.S. econoff asked several questions about the purpose, structure, costs and mandate of the proposed group. India and the UK raised similar concerns.

[13.](#) (U) The proposed group -- whose putative name is "Tripartite Forum for Interreligious Cooperation for Peace" -- is meant to provide a follow-up mechanism to the Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace held at the UN headquarters on June 22, 2005 (Ref B), and to build upon UNGA Plenary resolutions on "Culture of Peace," "Dialogue among Civilizations," and "Promotion of Religious and Cultural Understanding, Harmony and Cooperation." It would not, however, be an official body of the United Nations.

[14.](#) (U) The U.S. suggested, per Ref A, that the TOR refer to religious freedom consistent with the UN Declaration on the

Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion and Belief, but was opposed by Iran and Cuba. Iran suggested the TOR include a (problematic) call to prevent insults to religions and prophets. The Committee of Religious NGOs' suggestion that there should be either a rotating chairmanship or a troika leadership, encompassing an NGO, a member state, and a UN agency, ran into a barrage of procedural questions and reservations. The Philippine suggestion that all potential members put into writing their acceptance of all Terms of Reference before being accepted into the group also raised many questions. All participants in the February 20 meeting agreed that more time and closer scrutiny were needed before TORs (Ref C) could be endorsed for this group.

EXISTING GROUP -- ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

15. (U) The proposed group described above appears to duplicate the goals of the Alliance of Civilizations, established July 14, 2005 by the Secretary General, but lacks the intergovernmental support and involvement of the SYG's project. The Alliance of Civilizations, co-sponsored by Federico Mayor of Spain (former Dir-Gen of UNESCO) and Mehmet Aydin of Turkey (Minister of State and professor of theology), held its first meeting November 27, 2005 in Mallorca. The 18 prominent politicians, religious leaders and academicians from all regions of the world named by SYG Annan as members of the Alliance, include Professor John Esposito (Georgetown University) and Rabbi Arthur Schneier (Appeal of Conscience Foundation) of the United States. The SYG spoke at the Alliance's second meeting, February 25-26 in Doha, including on the violent reactions to the Prophet Mohammed cartoons published in European newspapers.

CONCLUSION/ACTION REQUEST

16. (C) The newly-formed Alliance of Civilizations has barely had a chance to achieve its stated aims of overcoming prejudice and polarization. With high-level support, a strong office within the Secretariat headed by former Chief of Staff Iqbal Riza, along with other highly respected expert participation, stands a better chance to make a positive impact than the poorly planned, proposed new "Forum." The Forum appears to be a vehicle headed towards coopting NGOs eager for a place at the table, and using them to give legitimacy to sham discussions on tolerance by nations mainly known for their own intolerant behaviors. USUN believes the U.S. would be best served by steering clear of this exercise. We would appreciate Department's guidance.

BOLTON